

## 6.2 Byzantine :: The Dome as an Act of Faith

- 1) *Constantine and Constantinople*
  - **Constantine** moves capital of Roman Empire to *Byzantium* and city is renamed **Constantinople** in **330 CE**
  - Very strategic land-bridge between Asia and Europe, through which a slender body of water called the **Bosporus Straight** connects the Mediterranean Sea (Sea of Marmara) with the Black Sea
  - At the junction of the Bosporus Straight and the Sea of Marmara is a peninsula where the Greeks built **Byzantium**, Constantine renamed it **Constantinople**, and later, the Ottoman Turks renamed it **Istanbul**
  - **Constantine's** architectural patronage is important, as is the fact he founded his capital there
  - Due to its being crowded, and built mainly built of timber Constantinople was prone to earthquakes and fire. As the city constantly rebuilt itself, its urban fabric became dense and chaotic with interspersed monuments... hence an adjective developed as a figure of speech: **byzantine**. When something is "byzantine" it is complicated, difficult to figure out, winding or undecipherable.
  
- 2) Under Constantine's rule, **three important church-related building types** emerge:
  - **basilica type** — although we've seen it earlier, Constantine uses this basilica form as an imperial headquarters. Essentially a linear three or five aisled form, higher in the central nave with clerestory lighting, and with an apse end where Constantine's throne would be (later as a church form the important apse would be where the priest's altar would be).
  - **central plan church** — the nave of the church and the transept (which cross at 90° making the crossing) are of equal length, creating great emphasis on the centralized **crossing** where the altar would be and where a dome or tower would be — a.k.a. **Greek Cross Plan**
  - **baptistery** — a separate pavilion for the Christian baptism
  - Apostoleion (330) (ah-post-oh-LAY-on) razed in 1100 but it was a model for **St. Marks in Venice**, a central-plan church (aka Greek Cross Plan) which accommodated five dome arrangement, called a **quincunx** (keen-synch)
  
- 3) **Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre (Jerusalem 326 CE)** (Holy SEP-uhl-kur)
  - Constantine's mother Helen spear-headed this project with her research into holy land sites and relics, such as the location of Christ's tomb
  - Architects who designed this church also designed **Hagia Sofia**
  - **Golgotha**, a.k.a. **Calvary** is inside this church, it's the rocky outcropping where Jesus was reportedly crucified
  - Relic of the true cross is below the crossing in a crypt
  - The **Anástasis** form is created - it's a *dome over a sacred relic*, in this case it's the tomb of Jesus Christ, unoccupied due to his resurrection. A highly centralized circular form with mysterious diffuse light, rings of piers and columns, and is part of a sequence of spaces. Here, the Anástasis hovers above the **Aedicula**, a small chapel built over the shrine where the tomb of Christ was thought to be.
  
- 4) **Hagia Sofia (Constantinople 326 CE)**
  - Begun by Constantine but destroyed by rioters in 404
  - Destroyed again in 532 under Emperor **Justinian I** — again by rioters who were upset about a sporting event in the nearby Hippodrome. **Justinian I** executed 30,000 rioters in the Hippodrome because of their bad behavior and proceeds to rebuild Hagia Sofia.
  - Justinian rebuild goes from **530-565** intent on superceding the majestic architectural effects of Hagia Polyuktos (poly-UKE-toss)
  
  - **Hagia Sofia means Church of the Holy Wisdom** (hagia + sofia = holy + wisdom)
  
  - The *exterior of Hagia Sofia does not have a unified arrangement of parts* that is immediately recognizable as later churches are. It appears almost as a pile of forms.
  
  - **Hagia Sofia** is all about the interior. Central dome *107 feet diameter*, and *164 feet at apex*
  - **clerestory lighting**
  - **pendentive arches** - or **pendentives** - are the arch-like triangular forms which transform the heavy massive cubic piers below into the delicate ring that forms the base of the shallow dome. The thrust and weight of the dome travel down the pendentives into the piers. Central dome is buttressed by two smaller semi-domes east and west. The piers for these are carved out in conch-like shapes. The other two sides, the north and south, have flat walls with high clerestory lighting. The overall effect is that the domes seem to float in a mysterious light.
  - Hagia Sofia is a **mixture of central-plan (Greek Cross) and basilica type**
  - The seating for the clergy in the apse is *cavea-like* seating called the **syntronon**
  - Detailing and carving of Hagia Sofia is byzantine - not classical - although basic moves

are similar, like base-shaft-capital. Byzantine capital transitions from orthogonal abacus to cylindrical column.

- 5) **Ravenna** becomes the Byzantine capital of Italy from about **400-600**
- **The Byzantine exteriors of Ravenna seem unremarkable.** They are compilations of clear geometric forms executed in brick with simple arched windows, buttresses, timber roofs sheathed in tile, sometimes arched windows are set in a second arch. **The great power of the Byzantine Architecture is in the interior spaces**, which reflect the clear geometry of the exterior, but are transformed by elaborate carving, mosaics, lighting effects and so on.
  - **Galla Placidia** (424-438 are her ruling years) was the daughter of an emperor, the wife of one, and as the regent for her son who became one, went through a period of great power and architectural legacy
  - **Galla Placidia** sponsors Ravenna's new Greek Orthodox cathedral and baptistry.
  - She sponsors the new cathedral of Santa Croce a plus her own mausoleum. Santa Croce no longer exists, but her **Mausoleum of Galla Placidia** (430) is still there.
  - **Theodoric** rules Ravenna **493-526 CE**. He is an Ostrogoth ruler invited in by the emperor in Constantinople at the time to help oust a barbarian ruler of Ravenna. Theodoric comes in and stays.
    - **Theodoric's Mausoleum** in Ravenna (**520 CE**). White marble Byzantine form, highly centralized, octagonal piers and base below with colonnade above (now gone)
    - **St. Vitale in Ravenna** (**526 CE**). Octagonal church - highly centralized also called **martyrium** (mar-TEER-ee-um) a tall central space surrounded by seven chapels and the eighth space being the apse end for services. Ambulatory all around. Beautifully sculpted conch half-round dome spaces that rose from angled piers. Byzantine detailing and carving influence comes from Constantinople. Although the work is **Byzantine**, it later will influence the early **Classical** revival called the **Carolingian Revival 270 years later....**